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ABSTRACT

A framework to analyze leadership with a focus on the concepts of commitment and vision is developed in this paper. Four sections discuss current views of reform concepts, leadership, vision, and commitment. A conclusion is that widespread, lasting school reform requires shared leadership, a collective vision based on organizational introspection, and commitment based on applied, incremental staff participation. Linking social structure with individual motivation is crucial to effective leadership. (21 references) (LMI)

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SHARED GOVERNANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY: THE KEYS TO LEADERSHIP, COMMITMENT AND VISION IN SCHOOL REFORM

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SHARED GOVERNANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY: THE KEYS TO LEADERSHIP, COMMITMENT AND VISION

Introduction

Much is being written these days about the crisis in leadership facing our nation (see, for example, Gardner, 1990; Bennis, 1989; Burns, 1978). Burns, for example, states that "one of the most universal cravings of our time is a hunger for compelling and creative leadership" (Burns, 1978, p. 1). Education has not been spared this crisis. In the past three decades the "shelf life" of university presidents and superintendents of public schools has been greatly reduced. In the 1950's, the average tenure for college presidents was eleven years; today it is four (Bennis, 1989). In the same way, superintendents' days seem to be numbered from the moment they are hired. In 1966, the turnover rate for superintendents in North Carolina was 8%; in 1989 the turnover rate was 25% (Ellis, Flynn, and Joslin, in preparation).

The supply of school reform literature about the importance of leadership, commitment and vision is tremendous. What is in short supply and great demand, in our view, are reasonably clear conceptions of these notions and descriptions of the relationships between and among these ideas. It is not much of an over simplification of the literature and training efforts to say that a principal must be the leader, with a vision, that will get the staff committed to reform the school. As one principal stated after attending effective schools training for a week: "I feel like I am supposed to become a leader this week, develop a vision during the ride home and have the staff committed to implementing the vision by Monday afternoon." [1]

The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework for analyzing these critical aspects of changing schools. As a part of this analysis we will present some problematic aspects of these concepts as they are currently used in school reform efforts. The remainder of the paper contains the following sections: Current Views of Reform Concepts; Leadership; Vision; Commitment; and Conclusion. In these sections we will present a position that if school reform is to take place in a large number of schools and have the capacity to sustain itself, then a different view is needed of leadership, how visions are developed, the process of commitment, the conditions of uncertainty and when a staff is likely to face the conditions of uncertainty associated with reform.

Current Views of Reform Concepts

As we have stated earlier, the general view of the relationship between leadership and school reform is that the school has a leader, the principal, who will find or develop a vision and obtain the commitment of the school staff and thus, lead the reform. The school staff because of their commitment are willing to face all of the uncertainties related to realizing the vision.

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[1]Throughout this paper we use the terms schools and principals simply because we decided to present the paper with this unit of analysis. We believe the arguments, concepts and analysis to be equally appropriate for different units of analysis, e.g., school systems.

This view has not been seriously questioned because it appears to explain the events of school reform. There are two major reasons why this view seems to explain the events of school change and they are both problematic to some degree. First, and the most simple, is that any school that is successful will have a principal. Of course, unsuccessful schools will also have principals. Thus, at the time a school is identified as successful much of the reform effort will have been completed and what gets reported is how the school chooses it write its history. These accounts are notorious for their inaccuracy. Kanter, for example, states: "....those who master change know that they can never tell the truth.. . ." (1983: 288). It is possible that the reform efforts could have been lead by teachers or others and the principal either supported the efforts or simply did not interfere. The point is that studied after the fact the principal will always appear to be a leader.

Second, there are principals who are tremendous leaders. These principals have vision, they obtain staff commitment and the vision is realized. If at any point in time you observe such a school you will see a principal who is a great leader and a staff doing wonderful things that are related to the vision. You will see their commitment. What is problematic about this situation is to what are the staff committed.

We believe there is an alternative explanation of this situation that is a more valid picture of what is happening in those reform oriented schools. We believe what happens most often is the principal has a vision for reform of the school. The principal,with good intentions, attempts to get staff commitment to the vision. However, we believe what happens most often is that what is perceived as staff commitment to the vision is, in fact, commitment to the principal. Thus, we have a staff that is committed to following a leader and not a vision. In this case school reform is being implemented by what Weber identified as charismatic authority (1947). The commitment does not have to be to the principal, it could be to anyone, e.g., an outside consultant. The strongest evidence for this explanation is the number of reform efforts that die when the leader leaves the school. Weber, of course, identified the major problem with charismatic authority as the inability to either delegate or institutional it (Weber, 1947, p.364). Thus, we find the assumption that a staff has become committed to a vision as unwarranted.

We do not believe that the conception of "a leader" for each school is either an appropriate or workable image. This view is centralizing leadership and power. Any number of writers have commented on the grave consequences of centralizing control when talent and knowledge are by their very nature decentralized. Thus, we find the assumption that a school has a single leader problematic if reform is going to occur on any broad scale.

Leadership is not in short supply in the school. Schools have many leaders. Various student groups have their leaders. Teacher groups have formal and informal leaders. Multiple leaders and leadership roles are exercised in the school. This leadership may be oriented toward school goals, contrary to school goals or simply unrelated and neutral to school goals.

The assumption of a single leader and the assumption that a staff is committed to a vision when they are most likely committed to a charismatic leader creates two major problems that make school reform on any large scale impossible. First, we find little reason to believe that each school contains a single leader with enough charismatic authority to create the necessary following for school reform. Second, in those schools, and we think the

number will be few, where school reform is created by a charismatic leader, then the reform is operational only as long as that leader is either respected or with the school.

Put briefly, the general view of leadership, vision and commitment does not tap the potential for leadership in schools, produces visions that are more likely to be cliches than dreams to be realized and leaves commitment as a problematic task, rather than a logical outcome of shared success.

Leadership

What is called for is a different conception of leadership. A conception of leadership that sees the diversity in schools as a resource and not a problem. All schools have many talented people and if a school is to be continuously successful, it must see this diversity of talent as a resource. Competing ideas and values can produce innovating and exciting solutions to problems (Quinn, 1988).

To capture and use this vast talent pool requires a different kind of leadership and not the most typical type of leadership in which leaders approach followers in order to exchange one thing for another (e.g., jobs for votes or compliance to a new program for a trip to a conference). What we are talking about here is a much more complex and powerful form of leadership and that is moral leadership (Burns, 1978). It is the kind of leadership which releases the potential of followers in the pursuit of shared purposes. It is a balance of individual and group needs. It is a type of leadership which is much more the empowerment of others than the exercise of power. In the words of Bennis and Nanus, this new leader is "one who commits people to action, converts followers into leaders, and may convert leaders into agents of change" (Bennis and Nanus, 1985, p.3). Anyone in the school could, and probably over time many would, be leaders.

We need leaders who have a concern for the common good--leaders who are constituents of the whole (Gardner, 1990). Through collaboration, these people ". . .seek to formulate goals and values that lift all participants out of their separate preoccupations by gaining their commitment to larger objectives" (Gardner, 1990, p. 106). Beginning teachers, for example, must feel they enter the school with two major responsibilities. They have a responsibility to engage in the best known practices in their classroom and they have a responsibility for the entire school; for if the school as a whole is moving in a common direction, the impact of any individual teacher within that school is greatly enhanced. At every level educators must feel this dual responsibility of best practices in their job assignment and a responsibility for the whole.

If we are going to produce the kind of leaders needed in educational administration, then these leaders must learn to talk a common language about the purposes of school reform. When most non-educators talk about school reform they are talking about the schools producing something that schools are not currently producing. This something different might be students knowing something different (e.g., critical thinking skills) or it might mean most students knowing what presently only a few students know (e.g., higher achievement test scores). Educators, as a group, talk about school reform in terms of some new or different program or procedure (e.g., stricter high school graduation requirements, stiffer teacher certification requirements, different teacher evaluation procedures). Thus, non-educators are talking about results and educators are talking about programs and procedures. If this issue of the purpose of school reform is not resolved,

then we see educators growing more frustrated and non-educators losing more and more confidence in public schools; for as Chubb and Moe (1990) became convinced after a three year study sponsored by the Brookings Institution, none of the "reforms" urged by the educational establishment has had much to do with schools being successful in producing results.

To resolve this issue, we think professors of educational administration and educational administrators must start thinking and talking about school reforms in terms of results. This thinking and talking must be different from statements like "a program to educate the whole child" or "we need a full-time librarain." Educators must begin to talk in terms of results that are generally understandable. If the bottom line for business is quality products and service that produce a profit, then the bottom line for public education must be equally clear. We think this bottom line for public schools, just as it is for business, will need to be articulated in both qualitative and quantitative terms. On the one hand, educators must convey to the public what is measured by standardized tests and how well students are doing on standardized tests. In North Carolina, for example, until the public believes that North Carolina students are doing well on achievement tests, S A T's and N T E's, they are not going to listen to anything we have to say. Once the public has some confidence about these tests results, then we can began to talk on the other hand about qualitative measures, such as, every child in the fifth grade who is not classified as having serious learning problems can read a newspaper article and tell the meaning of the article.

Given the above discussion, we believe that the first and foremost task of educational administration is leadership development. This must be the highest priority. We must provide the kinds of experiences that produce people for the public schools who can be both leaders and constituents of the whole. These leaders must be able to talk with a variety of groups about the results of school reform. In the absence of a results orientation, shared governance and responsibility have no base.

Developing Visions

By vision we mean a socially shared set of ideas that describe what is the desired state for continuance and development results.[2] Too often vision is seen as a short term act that produces a product, usually written, which the developers (either one person or a small committee) provide to everybody else. Such efforts and products will provide the same amount of guidance and vision as all the mission statements in self studies that are gathering dust on shelves in almost every school.

We believe the creation of a vision for a school is a long term set of actions that may never come completely to an end for the healthy, successful school. It is also a task for most if not all of the school staff and community. It is a complete set of actions that involves arriving at shared understandings about both what the school is presently like and what the

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[2]By continuance results we mean the results that a school is presently achieving and wants to continue. By development results we mean those results that a school desires but is not presently achieving. These two ideas are more important and more complex than these simple definitions convey. A complete discussion can be found in an article submitted for publication entitled "Leadership for Results", by Norman E. Ellis and Anne W. Joslin.

desired state is for the school. According to Deal, "the gateway to a better future requires a backward look and that rather than embracing the latest innovations, it may be wise to reconsider time-tested traditions" (Deal, 1990 p.7).

The view proposed here requires such organizational introspection. An underlying assumption is that all schools are doing some things well and these things should continue. Therefore, before the decisions are made on new directions for the school, time is spent on coming to consensus about the school as it presently exists. Each person, because of his/her unique position within the school, has an incomplete picture of what the school as a whole is like. It is only through putting all the pieces together that an accurate picture of the school can be developed. And, only when that picture is in place can one see "where the school is now", and make informed judgments about "where the school should be" (the dream). Only then is it possible to decide "how to get there," and thus make decisions about which of the present traditions and practices contribute to the dream and therefore should be continued, which traditions and practices are barriers to realizing the dream and therefore should be modified or eliminated, and/or what new traditions and practices need to be developed. These are what Cuban (1984) calls "second order" changes.

Most efforts to reform public schools have dealt only with "first order" changes; that is, correcting visible structural flaws such as teacher evaluation and reward systems, decision making authority, or unclear goals. However, such "first order" changes overlook more durable cultural values and mindsets underlying everyday behavior. These deeper patterns provide meaning and continuity but also are the source of many problems and frustrations (Deal, 1990). Modifying these involves "second order" changes, a level that most reform efforts have neglected (Cuban, 1984).

According to Deal (1990), deep structures and practices cannot be reformed; they have to be transformed. To transform a school is to alter its fundamental character and identity and this is what vision must be all about. It requires a fundamental renegotiation of rituals, regularities, and routines by multiple constituencies: teachers, administrators, students, parents, board members, politicians, and other citizens. It involves reshuffling the basic rules of the game.

Educators generally and administrators in particular, must recognize the need to have full participation by a wide-range of people in the development of a vision. Indeed, we have a growing body of literature(e.g., Chubb and Moe,1990) which maintains that without full participation by people both inside and outside the school, school success is very unlikely.This educational literature is pointing out for education what much of the recent business literature (e.g., Peters, 1987; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Crosby, 1990), points out:quality organizations stay close to and listen to their customers -- both internal and external customers.

If the development of a vision is not given this serious attention, then the force of school regularities, as noted by Sarason, will assure that "the more things change, the more they stay the same" (1971). Philip Jackson (1968) makes essentially the same point in what he called "the daily grind." Regularities either enhance or detract from intended outcomes, but they are so much an ingrained part of what occurs in schools everyday that they are typically not open to examination. Regularities can be and frequently are so powerful that a school's staff believes that the way things are is the way they have to be. This is critical since regularities inconsistent with

any reform or innovation can eventually overwhelm that reform or innovation.

Thus, if a vision is going to guide the reinvention of a school, we must recognize how deeply we must probe and understand if we are going to change the fundamental rules of the game.

Commitment

Commitment plays a major role in almost everyone's notions of school reform. On one hand it is as simple as if the staff is not committed to changing the school, then change is very unlikely to happen. On the other hand it is so complex and elusive that we only know when it is either present or absent.

The first question to ask is why commitment is such an important piece of any change effort? To understand this notion we must look at both personal and professional aspects. In looking at the personal aspects of committing to change, Gardner has observed "Human beings have a strong need to stabilize their environment. They do not like unpredictability, insecurity, and disorder" (1990, p.187). At the same time, however, most people are aware that change is certain and is facing us at an increasingly rapid rate. In the words of Tom Peters, change is so rapid that if we are to be successful, we must "thrive on chaos" (Peters, 1987). Problems are not solved once and for all, and new knowledge and new solutions are likely to generate new problems. Thus, any model intended to bring about school reform must, to paraphrase Gardner, address the "interweaving of continuity and change" and help the faculty achieve the sense of security and freedom from fear that enables them to risk renewal (Gardner, 1990, p.125).

The professional aspect of commitment to change deals with the technology of occupations and organizations. Asking a staff to change the way they are doing something is not as simple as changing the route one takes to work. Schein has made this point succinctly, "The introduction of any new technology into a occupation, organization, or society can be seen as a cultural change problem. Occupations typically build their practices, values, and basic self image around their underlying technology" (Schein 1985, p.36). We simply must recognize that what we perceive as small or even insignificant change can be viewed by others as fundamental change. In addition, it is usually not possible to change one part of a school and not effect other parts of the school. ". . . the successful introduction of any new technology must be viewed in part as a problem of meshing several occupational sub-cultures and/or changing the dominant organizational culture" (Schein, 1985, p.39). In proceeding with any change effort, it is necessary to identify the source of potential resistance. How change is introduced is of crucial importance and this, of course, returns to our notions of how visions are developed. "If the new technology is to succeed, those advocating it must recognize from the outset that the resistance to it is not to the technology per-say but to the cultural change implications of its introduction" (Schein, 1985, p.37).

Our conception of commitment is the investment of willingness and ability to realize a desired state. The critical aspects of commitment for school reform are understanding the conditions and processes that lead to the investment of willingness and ability. Stinchcombe after a review of the literature concluded there are five basic conditions that move people to create organizations. Stinchcombe was concerned about the formation of new organizations in societies but we believe the conditions he identified are applicable to schools. According to Stinchcombe: "People found organizations when (a) they find or learn about alternative better ways of doing things

that are not easily done within existing social arrangements; (b) they believe that the future will be such that the organization will continue to be effective enough to pay for the trouble of building it and for the resources invested; (c) they or some social group with which they are strongly identified will receive some of the benefits of the better way of doing things; (d) they can lay hold of the resources of wealth, power, and legitimacy needed to build the organization; and (e) they can defeat, or at least avoid being defeated by, their opponents, especially those whose interests are vested in the old regime. (Stinchcombe 1965:146)

These statements are characteristics of individual motivations and by themselves provide us little understanding about the nature of schools and processes for changing them. As Stinchcombe points out these motivations are effected by social structure. " In short, the probability that a man or group of men will be motivated to start an organization is dependent on the social structure and on the position of men within it." (Stinchcombe 1965:147) It is from the linkage of social structure and individual motivation that the processes of commitment can be understood. If in the development of a vision a staff has participated fully (i.e., they see their individual ideas, values and dreams represented in the vision), then commitment is a logical outcome of this linking process. If the vision is created and handed down or out, the best one can hope for is some level of compliance, and hopefully, compliance will not be confused with commitment.

The second way in which processes of commitment can be served and social structure and individual motivation linked is through a variation of what Peters (1987) calls applications-oriented small starts. These are small problems or issues which can be solved relatively quickly and with little or no additional resources but which improve school life. Examples include such things as rearranging schedules so that teachers at the same grade level have a common planning period and completing testing for special programs in the spring rather than the fall so that the teachers for various exceptional programs can begin teaching the first week of school rather than three weeks later. Thus, in low risk situations the staff has an opportunity to practice shared governance and build their confidence. At the same time, they are able to see the results of their efforts in the short term. These results might include failures as well as successes. In the case of failures, the faculty begins to learn that failure is not always negative and organizationally disruptive, but rather an opportunity for learning and beginning again more intelligently. They also begin to acquire the attitude that if they are not making mistakes, they are probably not going anywhere. As Tom Peters states, "Accelerating the success rate comes only from accelerating the failure rate. Revolutionary improvement in quality, service, and responsiveness will only occur when all are participating in the day-to-day enhancement of the product/service; that is when all are taking risks to try new methods. Numerous failures always (according to the laws of science) precede any success. Therefore, speeding up the success rate requires speeding up the failure rate" (Peters, 1987, p. 393). Kanter makes the same point but in a slightly different way: ". . .my observations and a wide variety of evidence indicate that, at least initially, employees would rather be involved in local issues reflecting daily annoyance. . . .It is important not to make assumptions about issues of great concern to employees" (Kanter 1983, p.253).

It is our view that if the conditions established by Stinchcombe are to be realized and staff commitment obtained, then one must: 1) start with issues that are of importance to the staff, however trivial others may think the issue is; 2) assume the development of a vision is going to take a

considerable amount of time and that there will probably be many false starts and blind alleys; and 3) take the view that the vision, cannot be handed down but rather must be developed by the full participation of all or almost all of those involved with the school.

Conclusion

What we have called for in this paper is a rethinking of leadership in school. It is in part a call to stop thinking about "a leader" and start thinking about the leadership potential in schools. It must be recognized that almost everyone in a school has the potential for leadership and over time almost everyone would, if the opportunity existed, play some leadership role. It is in part what Judith Warren Little calls a simple proposition: ". . . . it is increasingly implausible that we could improve the performance of schools, attract and retain talented teachers, or make sensible demands upon administrators without promoting leadership in teaching by teachers" (Little 1988, p. 78). It is not a call to ignore the truly remarkable leader in a school. Indeed, we should treasure and support such leaders with the caution that what we need is a staff committed to improving a school, not committed to a particular leader. We simply believe that there are too many schools and too few outstanding leaders to rely on such leaders for wide spread school reform.

It is a mistake to separate vision and commitment. It is, of course, possible for the person at the top to have a vision. Our point is that the source of the vision is not as important as the degree to which it is a shared vision. Senge makes this point by linking the vision for the organization to the personal vision of the people in the organization. He states, "The origin of the vision is much less important than the process whereby it comes to be shared. It is not truly a 'shared vision" until it connects with the personal visions of people throughout the organization" (Senge 1990, p. 214). The crucial point is that to work to get commitment to "your" vision is probably, at best, going to achieve some level of compliance. To have people work in the development of, understanding of and linking their personal view and values to a vision brings commitment as a logical outcome and not a problem to be solved.

Until a school staff has both reasons and experiences that demonstrate to them that they share in the governance of what the school might be, they are most unlikely to willing share in the responsibility of bringing the vision to a reality. It is this linking of social structure with individual motivation that produces the power and energy to make significant differences in our schools.

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